FACILITATOR GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The Workforce Investment Board Strategic Planning Module is a framework allowing Workforce Investment Board members to become familiar with their planning responsibilities. The module is a training session designed as a practical exercise, giving guidance on the principles of planning and then providing participants with an opportunity to start developing a Strategic Plan for their workforce development system. Participants should know in advance that this meeting is very much a "working session," designed to produce a tool that will assist a Board as they exercise their decision-making authority.

When scheduling such a session, facilitators need to think through the following pre-meeting considerations:

- The planning process qualitatively improves as the number of viewpoints increases. The optimal mix of participants should include a broad representation from the WIB, representatives of SDA staff, and representatives of important community partner organizations;
- The optimal size for a planning session is 20 to 30 participants. If there are more than 35 participants discussions can become unwieldy, and it may be difficult to stay on schedule. Fewer than 12 participants makes it difficult to get the level of intellectual exchange and energy needed for good planning;
- For larger boards, modify the activities to use more small group work and minimize "report outs," which can take a lot of time.
- It is strongly recommended that these planning sessions be advertised as "work sessions" and not as training activities. In particular, private sector representatives may not see a need to go to a training activity. The product orientation of the session should be stressed in announcements. Perhaps the best way to label the sessions is as a "kick off" of the Board's strategic planning process, one of its major responsibilities under the WIA.
- The major criteria for selecting a facilitator for the session are experience and independence. Most of the participants in these sessions will be individuals with extensive experience in public and/or private sector organizations. The meeting facilitator should have a reasonable amount of experience facilitating meetings with senior level managers and officials. The facilitator should have no close organiza-tional ties to any of the public or private sector organizations represented on the Board. It should be obvious that the facilitator has no "agenda" of his or her own. To emphasize the outreach of the WIBs to the private sector, Boards may want to consider having a senior or mid-level private sector manager serve as the facilitator (again someone with no direct ties to the Board). If the selected facilitator has not worked with employment and training programs previously, he/she obviously should be briefed on the basic components the WIA. However, there is no need for the facilitator to be seen as a content expert. The facilitator is there to manage a process. The Board members are the ones who have responsibility for developing a Strategic Plan.

- Meeting rooms should be set up “banquet style” with round tables seating 6-8. There should be one flipchart/marker set up for each table plus one for the facilitator.
- The room selected for a session should have some wall space suitable for hanging flipcharts. The facilitator should have an adequate supply of tape to place flipcharts on the walls.
- Each participant should have available a pen-pencil and a small writing pad.
- If a food break is scheduled, if at all possible arrange to have the food at the meeting facility.
- The facilitator needs to stress throughout the session that it is the participants who are doing the real work. The facilitator’s role is to keep a process on track. It is the participants who will identify issues and develop a strategic vision. The individuals in every session are there because they can provide valuable input to a product.
- The facilitator should familiarize him/herself with the exercises and omit any that are not appropriate. For instance, if the Board already has developed clear vision and mission statements, omit activity 1.
- The presentation materials should be adapted to meet the specific needs of the group. They can also be adapted for three different session lengths: 2 hours, 4 hours, and 6 hours**.** We recommend the following.
  - **2-hour session**: omit slides 8, 9, 20, 28, 31, 33, 34. This session would cover activities 2, 3 and 4, and some next steps.
  - **4-hour session**: omit slides 8, 9, 33, 34 (with activities 1 and/or 5 optional, if unnecessary or the group is behind schedule). This session would cover activities 1-5 (with 1 and 5 optional) and some next steps.
  - **6-hour session**: use the entire show with all activities. If the group moves quickly, you could assign more than one “hot issue” to each group to develop into goal statements, etc.
- The facilitator will have responsibility for developing a report (hard-copy and electronic versions) of documentation developed by the participants. Such reports should be “prose” versions of the documentation developed by the participants and not simply a direct transcription of the flipcharts. However, the document should not be a rewrite, but accurately reflect the input of the participants. During a session the facilitator should stress that only items placed on flipcharts representing consensus opinions will appear in the report. The hard-copy report will include the results of all the structured work activities as well as any substantive comments documented by the facilitator. The hard-copy report should be submitted to the sponsoring organization within 10 working days of a session.
- The facilitator should put materials in folders and give one to each participant (either at registration or by putting one at each seat). Materials should include:
  - Agenda

- Baldrige Handout
- Activity Sheets
- Pen
- Paper
- Name Badge and/or Table Tent

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #1-5

The first 5 overheads are designed to alert the participants to the objectives of the session and the process. As needed, some reminders for the participants:

- The session is product-oriented. In a 2-hour session the participants will identify critical implementation issues. In 4- and 6-hour sessions the participants will develop strategic planning documents.
- All products will be developed collaboratively through consensus.

In 4- and 6- hour sessions, after covering the points made on Overhead # 2, the facilitator might want to ask participants to introduce themselves. Introductions should include organizational affiliation, the experience each individual has had with employment and training programs, and (if appropriate) something light to try to break the ice or create comradery.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #6

A reminder for the facilitator:

- The facilitator should not be the center of attention. A session is going poorly if the primary activity is give and take between the facilitator and participants. A session is going well when a high proportion of the dialogue is among the participants, either in small work groups or in full group discussion. The facilitator should move quickly to one of the participant activities if too much dialogue is being directed at the facilitator.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #7

Points to be made as the facilitator discusses the appropriate agenda:

- Reference the agenda. Showing time for each activity is optional. It can help keep a group on track, but it also creates unnecessary dissatisfaction if a group legitimately takes longer than expected on a certain section.
- Stress once again that the real "end" of the session is finishing the work product. Finishing early is quite possible in 4- and 6-hour sessions.
- Stress that a key function of the facilitator is to ensure that a session ends at or before the scheduled time.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #8-9

Options for these overheads:

- This is an opportunity for the facilitator to elicit some informal comments from the participants on the problems that they anticipate. How can they work together cohesively and effectively? What organizational structures will be needed to fulfill their planning responsibilities? If responses are detailed the facilitator may want to document them on flipcharts and include in the meeting report.
- In two-hour sessions these flipcharts should be skipped unless the facilitator notes that the session is well ahead of schedule.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #10-11

An option for these overheads:

- The facilitator may want with this overhead to elicit some opinions from the Board members. How visible is the employment and training system in the local service area? Are employment and training programs viewed as major resources by the private sector and other major employers? The facilitator should probe to obtain the viewpoints of both public and private sector representatives. How far will they need to go to build the new system? This should be a brief (5-10 minute) discussion.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #12

Issues to be discussed with this overhead:

- Almost all participants will have had some experience with organizational planning so the facilitator should stress the differences between annual/fiscal year plans and strategic plans. In addition, the facilitator should stress the unique opportunity presented by the “start up” of WIA, an opportunity design a new system with few constraints from past programmatic structures

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #13

Issues to be discussed with this overhead:

- The facilitator should reference the Baldrige handout when discussing this overhead.
- The facilitator should list the Baldrige criteria on a flipchart as they are discussed. This flipchart should be kept in view during the activities later in the session. The facilitator can remind the participants to keep the Baldrige criteria in mind as they develop their action documents.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #14

Items to be discussed with this overhead include:

- Almost all participant groups bring a variety of negative stereotypes about planning to an exercise of this type. This slide is a chance to get these stereotypes “on the table” before they infect the discussions. The facilitator should state this explicitly.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #15

- The facilitator should ask the group if anyone has any other reasons why strategic planning is important that they want to share, or if anyone wants to share an example of how strategic planning helped their organizations do any of the benefits listed on the slide.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #16

- The facilitator should post the Strategic Planning Cycle on flipchart paper somewhere in the room.
- As the facilitator lists all the steps in the strategic planning process he/she should have the participants refer back to the planning cycle. The facilitator should emphasize that strategic planning is a process, and not simply the production of a single product.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #17

Issues to be discussed with this flipchart:

- The overhead of the planning cycle gives the facilitator one last opportunity to stress the major elements of the planning process.
- Unless pressed for time the facilitator should probe the participants about their experiences with strategic planning. Are there formats some individuals think are particularly useful as planning/management tools? Are there processes that seem to work well? Are there some pitfalls that should be avoided? Substantive comments and suggestions should be documented on a flipchart.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #18-19

Issues to be discussed with this overhead include:

- The facilitator needs to stress that this is the " I have a dream" aspect of Strategic Planning. Probe both the public and private sector representatives to see if they can provide examples of "visioning" that have benefited their organizations. Also probe to see if any participants know of major pitfalls in the "visioning" process that should be avoided.
- If there is time, the facilitator may want to probe the group after presenting the example Overhead#19. Does this example "capture" the initial orientation of both public and private sector participants? If the probe leads to a lively discussion, the facilitator should set a firm time limit for the discussion (5 minutes). Remind the participants that they will have ample opportunity to address this issue both today and in subsequent meetings.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #20

Issues to be discussed in relation with this flipchart:

- Unless the session is significantly behind schedule the facilitator should initiate this activity immediately after Overhead #19. This activity should normally be included in all 4- and 6-hour sessions
- The facilitator should stress that this is only a “scratch the surface” opportunity. It is not expected that they will get a finished product today.
- This is an activity where the facilitator should act as a strict timekeeper. Give the participants 6- and 8-minute warnings before calling closure at the 10-minute mark.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #21

Issues to be discussed with this overhead:

- As the facilitator goes down the list of assessment questions, he/she should probe the participants about data sources to answer these and related questions. Where and how can the Board get the information it will need?
- Any substantive suggestions for data sources or information gathering processes should be documented on a flipchart and left in view of the participants for the remainder of the session.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #22

Issues to be discussed with this overhead include:

- In this full group interaction the facilitator should take great care to maximize input. If initially there is input from only one category of participant (e.g., public sector) the facilitator should probe strongly for input from other types of participants.
- The facilitator will document input on flipcharts. Remind the participants that these are initial suggestions, and the list will be refined as the planning process proceeds. In this activity avoid having participants getting into lengthy discussions on definitions or policy-related issues. Stress that in this activity the point is to get some “ideas on the table”.
- The facilitator should document all input from participants even if it appears to be duplicative or to have little general support.
- This activity should be strictly timed to 15 minutes.
- It will probably be difficult to reach consensus on the answers in this session. At a minimum, however, try to reach agreement on who the customers are (even if people disagree about their “ranking” or relative importance). This will enable the group to have a focused discussion for the last 2 questions.

FACILITATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #23

Items to keep in mind during this work assignment:

- Stress the need for silence. One objective is to obtain the largest possible list of implementation issues.
- While the individuals are developing their lists, the facilitator should walk around the tables to see how quickly the work is going. Also this helps to keep conversation to a minimum.
- If it appears necessary, give the participants one time extension. However, the time extension should be definite, an extra 2-3 minutes on the nose.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #24-25

Items to be considered during this activity:

- The facilitator should assemble work groups randomly. The easiest way is to have participants count off with the highest number being equal to the number of work groups. (Have people count off 1 to 5 if there are 5 groups.)
- Participants should not be allowed to pick or switch groups unless there is a good reason (e.g., all the state agency people have ended up at the same table).
- If you need to save time or sense that tables are working well together, have people work with the others seated at their table. If you need bigger groups, try combining 2 tables.
- In sessions where there is more than 1 small group exercise, you could choose different groups for each exercise. This gives participants the opportunity to work with a wide range of people.
- During the exercise the facilitator should walk among the tables to check progress. About two-thirds of the way through the assignment remind the participants that they will need to start documenting their lists on flipcharts.
- If necessary, give one brief time extension to allow for all work groups to finish their lists.
- The facilitator needs to emphasize that each group has a spokesperson for their work product. The facilitator should not simply read a list from the group's flipchart.
- At this point questions from other participants should be restricted to clarifications of the group reports. This session should not become a lengthy discussion of substantive issues.
- If needed, the facilitator should "edit" the participant flipcharts to be sure that the documentation is understandable and easy to adapt for the hard copy report. This should only be done with the consensus agreement of the participants.
- The facilitator should develop a flipchart list of key issues as the reports are made. As flipcharts are filled up, they should be taped to a wall so participants can see the entire list of key issues with one look.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #26

- In most sessions there will be considerable overlap among the issues identified by the small groups. In the general discussion the facilitator should encourage the combination of issues where appropriate. Definitions may be refined and documented by the facilitator, but only with the consensus agreement of the whole group.
- To reach consensus quickly, allow everyone X (e.g., 5) “votes” (check marks or dot stickers) that they can use to indicate what they believe is most important. These can spread out over several issues, or put all on one issue. The topics that get the most votes are not necessarily the “top 5,” but can serve to start the conversation and see if there is consensus around these 5.
- Alternatively, the facilitator could prepare a flipchart or overhead with the criteria for selecting priorities and work as a group to identify those topics that meet the most criteria for selection.
- Prioritization discussions normally take 5-10 minutes. If the discussion begins to move beyond such a timeframe, the facilitator should make a suggestion to have an agreement on a “fudged” list (the top 5, the second 5). Remind the participants that they are engaged in a consensus process and the final decision may not be everyone’s optimal choice, but must be one that everyone can support.
- The key factor in determining how long to let a discussion proceed is the amount of substantive dialogue. As long as there are substantive exchanges, the discussion should proceed. If statements become repetitive or only a few participants are engaged, then the facilitator should assume his/her role as timekeeper and bring the discussion to closure.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #27

- Mention that the "top 5" list will be the framework for their strategic goals.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #28-29

- The facilitator should be aware that the Board or elected officials might be responsible for sanctions for low performance in the mandated measures for certain programs (i.e., WIA Title I). These program measures do matter. However, it is important for the Board to focus on broader community measures. How to balance both may generate some discussion.
- These two slides might give the participants the opportunity to “operationalize” performance measurement. Once the facilitator has gone through Overhead #29, have the participants look at the priority issues, and note their initial thoughts on appropriate measures for each. Stress the need for realism.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #30

Issues to be discussed with this overhead include:

- If not pressed for time, the facilitator may want to probe the group to see if some see a clear logical flow like this for one of the priority issues. Ask the participants to refer to the personal notes.
- Any substantive input from this probe should be documented on a flipchart.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #31

- For this activity, the participants should be in 5 groups. The participants can remain and work in the same small groups as they did for prioritization activity.
- The facilitator will randomly assign one priority issue to each work group.
- All consensus products of the work groups should be documented on flipcharts as in the prioritization exercise.
- The “reporting out” process should be the same as in the prioritization activity.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #32-34

- For the action planning activity, participants can stay in their same groups or be divided randomly into new work groups (depending on how much time you have and the group dynamics).
- Do not assign topics to each group until the groups have settled at the appropriate table. Definitely do not let participants pick a group with their “favorite” topic.
- Remind participants that everyone will have input into all action agendas when the draft documents are presented to the entire group
- Once the participants are at the tables, refer them to Activity Sheet 6, the suggested format for their action agendas.
- Before the work groups begin their discussions, use the Mark Twain quote on Overhead #34 as a reminder of the “tight” language needed in action planning.
- If necessary, approximately two-thirds of the way through this activity the facilitator should remind the work groups to start documenting their action agendas.
- Once all action agendas are “flipcharted,” spokespersons will present the Action Agendas to the full group. The facilitator should stand with the spokesperson as these reports are given. Based on comments received from the full group, the Action Agendas will be modified or expanded on the flipcharts. This will be done only with the consensus of the entire group.
- If time is short, the facilitator may need to start the report-outs while other teams are still documenting their action agendas on the flipcharts.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEADS #35-36

- The facilitator should stress the importance of "follow-up" in this process. The Board should leave the session with a good start on their strategic planning, which will drive future meetings and work. Action plans will help them not lose the momentum of today's session.
- The process steps listed on Overhead #35 should be presented as suggestions. When presenting that overhead the facilitator should elicit suggestions from participants about ways to "institutionalize" the strategic planning process. As usual, if there are any substantive comments, the facilitator should get input from both public and private sector representatives. Substantive suggestions should be documented on a flipchart.
- The facilitator should probe for examples of "feedback loops" leading to improved performance. The facilitator should particularly attempt to get examples from the private sector representatives.

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS – OVERHEAD #37

- The facilitator should recap the next steps, making sure everyone is clear about who is responsible and due dates.
- The facilitator should give the sponsor and the participants the opportunity to specify any follow-up assignments that did not arise earlier.
- Before the group breaks up the facilitator should make sure he/she knows where all the flipchart documentation is located. For the 4 and 6-hour sessions the facilitator should note on the flipcharts the planning issue being discussed.
- The facilitator should identify all participants who will receive copies of the draft meeting report.